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AUTHOR Cameron, Paul; And Others
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ABSTRACT

While it has been asserted that rape has increased in frequency over the past generation, part of this increase may be due to a greater willingness to report rape to the authorities. A study was conducted to examine the frequency of rape and to describe the characteristics of rape victims. A random questionnaire survey of 4,340 adults in five urban areas was conducted in 1983. The results revealed that 4% of men and 16% of women surveyed claimed to have been raped. When adjustments for comparability with population age parameters were made, it appeared likely that about 3% of men and 13% of women claimed to have been raped. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 26 years of both sexes reported having been raped about five times more frequently than did adults over age 55. Homosexuals of both sexes reported having been raped over three times more frequently than did exclusive heterosexuals. Women either reared as devout Christians or currently claiming to be devout Christians reported about three-fifths the prevalence of rape reported by irreligious subjects. Reports of rape were found to vary considerably as a function of individual and/or social psychology, sex, and age. (Author/NB)

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Is the Rape Rate Increasing?

Paul Cameron, Ph.D., Family Research Institute, Inc., 3110 N. 40th, Lincoln, NE 68506
Kay Proctor, M.A., Dept. Special Education, Univ. Louisville
Kirk Cameron, B.S., Statistics Dept., Stanford Univ.
William Coburn, Jr., M.D., Dept. Clinical Medicine, UCLA and
Nels Forde, Ph.D., Dept. of History, Univ. Nebraska

Abstract: A random questionnaire survey of 4,340 adults in 5 urban areas in 1983 found 4% of men and 16% of women claiming to have been raped. When adjustments for comparability with population age parameters are made it appears likely that about 3% of men and 13% of women claim to have been raped. Young adults (aged 18 to 26) of both sexes reported having been raped about 5 times more frequently than older (aged 56+) adults did. Homosexual practitioners of both sexes reported having been raped over 3 times more frequently than exclusive heterosexuals did. Women either reared as devout Christians or currently claiming to be devout Christians reported about three fifths the prevalence of rape reported by the irreligious.

Rape has been recently viewed as a growing public health problem. While is asserted that rape has increased in frequency over the past generation (1), how much of this is a function of greater willingness to report rape to authorities? How many are raped in their lifetime? What proportion of rape is homosexual and what proportion is heterosexual? Does adherence to Christianity, which tends to suppress and limit sexuality, affect chances of being raped?

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Method

Area probability samples yielding 4,340 adults were drawn in Los Angeles, Denver, Omaha, Louisville, and Washington, D.C. and an extensive sexuality questionnaire was self-administered (2). From February to November 1983 conventional one-wave systematic area cluster sampling was carried out in the 5 standard metropolitan areas in addition to two small pilots in Bennett, NE and Rochester, NY. In Los Angeles, Denver, and the District of Columbia, sampling was carried out every day of the week from 9 A.M. to approximately 9:30 P.M.; in the other locations, sampling took place in late afternoons, early evenings and on weekends. The first adult answering the door was informed that our purpose was to conduct a random nationwide sexuality survey. If an eligible male were present, his cooperation was sought, but any one adult (aged 18 or older) from a household unit was solicited. Respondents were assured anonymity and asked to self-administer a 550-item questionnaire (which took about 75 minutes), seal it in the provided envelope, and then give it to the retuning interviewer. Some retrievals were made as long as a week later. All non-retrievals were counted as rejections.

For varying reasons, some respondents preferred to mail in the questionnaire and they were given a stamped, self-addressed evelope for that purpose. Not-at-homes totalled 1911 in Omaha, 2720 in Los Angeles, 1774 in Denver,1837 in D.C.,992 in Louisville, 24 in Bennett and 31 in Rochester. Rejections were 737 in Omaha, 855 in Los Angeles, 538 in Denver, 259 in D.C., 936 in Louisivlle, 26 in Bennett, 12 in Rochester. Mail-ins distributed were, respectively, 496, 834, 364, 539, 10, none, and 4. Mailed-in, respectively were 193, 318, 146, 156, 5, 0, and 3; totals obtained were 979 in Omaha, 934, 970, 635, 767, 43, and 12; and the compliance rates were 44%, 36%, 52%, 44%, 45%, 62%, and 31%. The over-all rejection rate was 36%, but since 63.3% of the potential mail-ins did not return the questionnaire, our over-all compliance rate was 43.5%. Interviewers estimated the age and recorded

the sex of those who rejected our efforts. The median age of rejectors was 55 yr., 41.7% were male.

While our sample is probably more representative than any other surveyed on rape experience, significant deficiencies include: 1) 56% of potential respondents did not participate, 2) the sample is heavily urban, and 3) the sample is younger and more educated than the general population. Claims of rape were indexed by "have you ever been forced into having sexual activity against your will (you were raped)? [no/yes] If 'yes', how many times have you been forced heterosexually?____ how many times have you been forced homosexually?_____" Respondents also classified their sexual orientation: "How would you rate your sexual desires: not really sexual, not interested/only sexually interested in and attracted to members of the opposite sex (I'm exclusively heterosexual)/generally attracted to members of the opposite sex, but sometimes am sexually attracted to members of my own sex/ equally sexually attracted to members of both sexes (I'm bisexual)/generally attracted to members of my sex, but sometimes I'm sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex/ only sexually interested in and attracted to members of my own sex (I'm exclusively homosexual) and later in the instrument each rated self as "heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual". Only those who claimed exclusive heterosexuality on the first question and heterosexuality on the second were classified as "exclusively heterosexual" while any choice of bi- or homosexuality led to classification as bi/homosexual. Respondents also reported their religious orientation [Catholic or Protestant (counted as Christian), Mormon, Jewish, other and none]; degree of devotion to their religion [very devout, moderately devout, somewhat devout, not at all devout], their religious upbringing, and past degree of devotion in the faith of their upbringing. Later in the questionnaire, those who had been raped were asked for their reaction to their first heterosexual rape [liked it/?/disliked it].

Results

Four percent of males and sixteen percent of females claimed to have ever been raped (Table 1). For those reporting having been raped, 28% of the males and 33% of the females claimed to have been raped more than once. Ever having been raped was reported more frequently by both younger males ($X = 15$; P.01) and younger females ($X = 48$; P<.001) than their older counterparts (generational status after (3). For both sexes, reports of ever having been raped either homosexually or heterosexually declined with age. Those claiming to practice homosexual acts reported over triple the rate of rape than those claiming exclusive heterosexuality (Table 2). 56% of males claimed to have liked their first heterosexual rape, 95% of females claimed to have disliked their first heterosexual rape.

The irreligious, as indexed by rearing or by current faith, generally reported higher rates of heterosexual rape than did Christians [those claiming to be or to have been "very" or "moderately" devout were counted as "devout" in Table 3, remaining Christians as "nominal"]. We found no evidence that Christians raised as "devout" and currently "devout" (59% of the Christian sub- sample) differed from those who either changed their faith (7%) and/or level of devotion to their faith (34%) in rate of reporting ever having been raped. However the "always devout" consistently reported lower experience of rape than the always irreligious (69% of the irreligious were raised as irreligious and were currently irreligious).

Discussion

Reports of rape varied considerably as a function of individual and/or social psychology (e.g., Christian vs. irreligious; heterosexual vs. homosexual), sex, and age. Taken at face value, young males and females are over five times more apt to be raped than their grandparents were. Since rape would presumably not be an event easily forgotten, our results are consistent with a substantial increase in the probability of being raped coincident with the 'sexual revolution' of the past 40 years. Values espoused by the sexual revolution such as hypersexualization of interpersonal relations, assumed and perhaps actual greater sexual aggressiveness by and sexual requirements of females, and the reduction of formalized, non-sexual customs in dating, and the uncoupling of love and sex may well have had influences toward increasing the rape rate.

Females and homosexual practitioners were over thrice as apt to report ever having been raped as were males or heterosexuals.

Russell's (4) study of a random sample of San Francisco women concluded that 44% had been raped at least once. But Russell veritably "mined" for rape by including spousal rape, unwanted kissing, petting et cetera. By the legal definition of rape in California, Russell estimated that 19% of her sample of females had been raped. If both our sample and her's were adjusted for the disproportionate absence of older respondents, the Russell sample would probably have generated a rape rate of 16% and ours a rate of 13% for adult females. A 1970 study of San Francisco sexuality (5) reported that 9% of male heterosexuals [vs. our 1%], 24% of gays [vs. our 13%], 2% of female heterosexuals [vs. our 1%] and 11% of lesbians [vs. our 9%] reported having been homosexually raped. Possibly residing in sexually charged San Francisco accounts for the higher rape rates as compared to what we found.

One southern medial practice reported that 20 to 25 percent of adult victims of rape have a history of previous assault (6). Our figure of 28 to 33 percent reporting more than one rape is consonant with this estimate, and suggests that some members of the population may be 'rape prone'.

Homosexuals of both sexes claimed considerably higher rates of having been raped than heterosexuals did. Whether this dispro- portionality is due to the personality traits associated with homosexual habits as formulated by Bergler (7) (e.g., "injustice collecting" [perhaps homosexuals were more apt to construe sexual events as rape], "general unreliability" [perhaps homosexuals were more apt to fabricate rape experience] and/or more frequent exposure to sexually dangerous situations cannot be determined from our data. Of note, this sample of homosexuals claimed over ten times the rate of having been sexually molested as children as compared to this sample of heterosexuals (8).

About 6% of reported rapes in one jurisdiction were of males (9). If we count those who claimed to have been raped more than once as having experienced 2 rapes, our sample reported 467 rapes of which 40 (8.6%) were of males.

The marked difference in rape experience between devout Christian and irreligious women is intriguing. As with robbery, exposure to possible rape is to some degree a matter of choices (a walk in New York City's Central Park at 1 am involves a much greater risk of mugging than the same walk at 1 pm). Perhaps females raised in irreligious environments more frequently place themselves in dangerous situations (while rapes occur in churches, the rate there is far below the rate in bars) and/or associate with individuals more disposed to commit rape. In either case, some femininist argument about rape appears, to a significant degree, to seek to 'hold society accountable' for all the consequences of personal choice. While some statuses are 'given' and tied to greater vulnerability to rape (e.g., sex and age), many, such as irreligiosity and par-

ticipating in homosexual activity, are chosen. While some proportion of rapes are random, falling equally upon the chance-takers and the careful, a significant proportion, perhaps as many as half, appear to be associated with and a consequence of kinds of choices (e.g., irreligiosity or homosexuality). Part of the feminist argument regarding rape assumes that 'the rape of a prostitute ought to be regarded as violative of social functioning as the rape of a nun' (see 4 discussion and references). Is every member of society worthy of the same legal protections no matter how problematic their choices? Are we to treat a "no" by a man as the same thing as a "no" by a woman when most men claim to have enjoyed being heterosexually raped while most women claimed displeasure? Is the rape of a homosexual the same as the rape of a heterosexual?

If rape is to be regarded as a public health problem, it appears to be growing. What recommendations ought health professionals to make to curb rape? Should 'sexual liberation' be opposed since it appears to be coincident, perhaps causal, of this trend? Ought homosexuality to be opposed since it appears to be so strongly associated with the experience of rape? Ought Christianity to be supported since it appears to offer significant 'protection' against rape? If the proper scope of medicine is to oppose tobacco advertizing lest impressionable youth become addicted, might not suppression of sexually explicit materials be supported? The logical end of medical social interventions is difficult to predict.

Table 1

Claims of Rape by Males and Females

age	males:	(% ever raped)	% hetero:% homo	females:	(% ever raped)	% hetero: % homo
young adult (18-25)		23/375 (6.1)	2.9:2.1		116/524 (22.1)	17.0:1.0
adult (26-39)		27/581 (4.6)	2.4:1.9		190/1108 (17.1)	13.2:0.5
middle aged (40-55)		8/327 (2.4)	1.2:1.8		77/534 (14.4)	11.0:2.1
older (56-64)	}	3/296 (1.0)	.3: .7		17/216 (7.9)	5.7: ØØ
old (65+)	}				10/209 (4.8)	3.3:ØØ

Table 2

Sexual Orientation and Claims of Rape

		exclusively heterosexual	bisexual/homosexual
rape	male	43/1341 (3.2%)	10/80 (12.5%)
	female	314/2009 (15.6%)	36/70 (51%)
heterosexual rape	male	32 (2.4%)	Ø
	female	300 (14.9%)	34 (48.6%)
homosexual rape	male	17 (1.3%)	10 (12.5%)
	female	12 (.6%)	6 (8.6%)

Table 3

Female Claims of Heterosexual Rape: Christian vs. Irreligious

raised as					currently				
n	ever raped	once	multiply	young adult (18-25)	n	ever raped	once	multiply	
205	36(18%)	20	16	devout Christian	157	22(14%)	13	9	
207	43(21%)	31	12	nominally Christian	225	50(22%)	33	17	
61	16(26%)	12	4	no religion	90	30(33%)	21	9	
	95(20%)	.34 rapes/				102(22%)	χ^2= 14.9; df=2; P <.001		
				adult (aged 26-39)					
503	73(15%)	50	23	devout Christian	383	53(14%)	34	19	
441	78(18%)	47	31	nominally Christian	393	69(18%)	45	24	
47	9(19%)	5	4	no religion	200	33(17%)	21	12	
	160(16%)	.27 rapes/				155(16%)	χ^2<1; NS		
				middle aged (40-55)					
300	32(11%)	23	9	devout Christian	263	34(13%)	22	12	
176	28(16%)	19	9	nominally Christian	163	13(8%)	9	4	
17	4(24%)	2	2	no religion	63	15(24%)	10	5	
	66(13%)	.21 rapes/				62(13%)	χ^2= 10.03; df=2; P <.0		
				older (aged 56+)					
288	12(4%)	9	3	devout Christian	274	12(4%)	8	4	
137	7(5%)	5	2	nominally Christian	110	5(5%)	4	1	
9	2(22%)	1	1	no religion	38	4(11%)	2	2	
	21(5%)	.07 rapes/				21(5%)	χ^2= 2.01; NS		

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